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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 BEIRUT 003414

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NSC FOR ABRAMS/DORAN/MARCHESE/HARDING
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SUBJECT: LEBANON: DAS DANIN MEETS LEBANESE FORCES LEADER
SAMIR JA'JA'

Classified By: Christopher W. Murray, Charge d'Affaires. Reason: Section 1.4 (d).

SUMMARY

1. (C) Samir Ja'ja' told DAS Danin that Syria and Hizballah will try either to stall the international tribunal for the Hariri assassination by loading the cabinet with a blocking minority or by bringing the government down through street demonstrations. Ja'ja' assessed the March 14 coalition as strong, but suggested that Prime Minister Siniora may not have the fortitude to last in a violent confrontation; Michel Aoun is a minor political opportunist. Ja'ja' speculated that LAF and UNIFIL troops deployed in the south could be attacked if sanctions were applied against Iran over its nuclear program. He said that Hizballah emerged from the July war weaker and less cohesive, and suggested that the two keys to solving Lebanon's crisis are strengthening UNIFIL and Israel handing over the Sheba'a Farms to Lebanon or to the UN. Ja'ja' confided that while March 14 coalition will work to elect a new president on time next year, the group will not take up the issue of electoral reform for now because it is a divisive issue within the bloc. End summary.

2. (C) Visiting NEA DAS Robert Danin, Polchief and Polstaff called on Lebanese Forces Party Leader Samir Ja'ja' October 19 at his mountain residence in northern Lebanon. Danin expressed his and the USG's strong support for Lebanon and USG desire to see the country move forward.

SYRIAN AND HIZBALLAH AGENDAS

3. (C) Dr. Ja'ja' (who left medical school before graduation due to the civil war but, according to Lebanese custom, bears the title) described the overall situation in Lebanon as satisfactory, but cautioned that there are several threats ahead and that the parliamentary majority (i.e., the March 14 coalition) would have to be prepared to confront the "coming possible dangers." Ja'ja' said that the internal situation was now turbulent due to two factors: Syria and Hizballah.

4. (C) Syria, he said, is concerned about the international tribunal that would address the Hariri assassination and other violent acts. The only way the Syrians see to block the tribunal is to kick out the current GOL. Since the Syrians have no influence over the UN Security Council or

Brammertz, he said, they have plans to destabilize and topple the GOL. "Syria is using all political and security tools in order to break the current government." The call for a national unity government is a bid to stall the international tribunal by blocking cabinet approval for its establishment.

15. (C) Hizballah, according to Ja'ja', has its own reasons not to like the tribunal, though the issue is a marginal one for Hizballah. The major concern for Hizballah is the strict application of UNSCR 1701, which Hizballah agreed to in order to reach a ceasefire. The March 14 coalition, however, views the resolution as a whole -- including the revival of the 1949 Israel-Lebanon Armistice Agreement. If the Agreement is operating and Israel respects the Blue Line, he said, Hizballah "has no more work to do."

16. (C) The "Hariri Government" did not agree to dilute the resolution, Ja'ja' continued, as Hizballah had wished. (Note: It is unclear whether Ja'ja' meant to slight Siniora by several references to his government as the "Hariri Government" or whether this was a mere slip. End note.) Hizballah's ministers refused to allow a German team to come to Lebanon and survey the Blue Line, for example. After that controversy, according to Ja'ja', Hizballah decided to oppose the GOL.

17. (C) Ja'ja' said that a third player, and a relatively minor one, is General Michel Aoun. All Aoun wants is a share in the GOL because he is looking for the Presidency. Aoun cares neither about the tribunal nor about UNSCR 1701, Ja'ja' suggested. Aoun knows that Syria and Hizballah are playing games to prevent a new presidential election when Lahoud's term ends, and Aoun wants to be in the cabinet so that he can prepare for the eventuality under which the cabinet rules

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alone, after Lahoud's term. (Note: Should Parliament fail to elect a successor, the cabinet would continue to rule without a president. In such a situation, Aoun might try to assume primacy within the cabinet if he were a member at that time. End note.)

RIOTS TO UNNERVE SINIORA

18. (C) Hizballah is planning with Syria to instigate riots and popular unrest as well as continue attacks such as the recent grenade attacks, Ja'ja' asserted. He claimed that according to one piece of information, Hizballah plans to enter the Grand Serail and physically expel Siniora. When Danin asked how vulnerable the GOL might be, Ja'ja' replied simply that it is not vulnerable at all. March 14 is strong enough to resist attacks by force.

19. (C) However, if there is a confrontation which results in deaths at the hands of GOL security forces, Ja'ja' said, "I don't know how Prime Minister Siniora will react. There is the human factor," he said. "In my assessment, we might be able to sustain him and help see him through. He was, during the war, at one point..." Ja'ja' paused, making a hand gesture to suggest "wishy-washy." "Two weeks ago, he was extremely tired. Biologically, Ja'ja' continued, Siniora is an unknown variable. (Comment: Ja'ja' dwelt on this theme a while longer, as if to ensure that we would not miss his assessment of Siniora as perhaps lacking the nerve to sustain a violent confrontation with Hizballah. End comment.)

ROLE OF EXTERNAL FORCES

110. (C) Danin noted that the USG is encouraged by the LAF's deployment to the south. Ja'ja' responded that the LAF and UNIFIL deployments are both a strength and a weakness. Hizballah doesn't like the deployments because they restrict its margin of maneuver. Hizballah, however, can't fight the LAF or UNIFIL.

¶11. (C) Iran, on the other hand, can turn the LAF and UNIFIL deployments into a target in Lebanon. "We are on the verge of a security confrontation with Iran" over the nuclear issue, he said. "When the UNSC imposes sanctions in two to three months, Iran will not sit idly by -- it will respond." Iran may respond in Iraq, but it won't make much difference there, he said. One place Iran can truly hit back is in south Lebanon, and it will resort to Hizballah.

¶12. (C) Syria is against the LAF/UNIFIL deployments for the same reasons. The Syrians don't want security in Lebanon because they want to assert influence. They are lobbying Sunni fundamentalists, including small radical groups in Syria itself, in Iraq, in the Palestinian territories, and in Lebanon including its Palestinian camps.

HIZBALLAH WEAKER

¶13. (C) When DAS Danin asked what Hizballah hoped to accomplish in its July attack against Israel, Ja'ja' said that he believed Hassan Nasrallah had made a poor calculation and that he had believed his attack and kidnapping would not precipitate a war. If he had taken the example of Israel's reaction to the Gaza kidnapping of an Israeli soldier into consideration, Nasrallah would have known better. According to his sources, Ja'ja' added, Iran was angry with Nasrallah for starting a war at the wrong time.

¶14. (C) Nasrallah is weaker now than at the start of the war, Ja'ja' speculated. Hizballah's core group is unchanged (i.e., the same people with the same level of commitment) but beyond this "people are tired." Even in Shia communities people are starting to speak out, he claimed. Making matters more complicated, the Shia community in general feels threatened and without a role alongside the Sunnis and Christians. Speaker Berri is playing a positive role, Ja'ja' estimated, in easing tensions.

SOLUTIONS

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¶15. (C) Ja'ja' then turned to his proposed solutions. "Step up UNIFIL fast, to 15,000" he said. UNIFIL should bring military intelligence and reconnaissance capabilities to use against Hizballah. Humint should play as great a role as reconnaissance.

¶16. (C) When Danin asked whether UNIFIL's efforts could be made effective in a short time frame, Ja'ja' said he had no doubt that it could with help from friendly parties in the south. Christian villages in the south, Ja'ja' said, are "fed up" with Hizballah, as are many Shia communities. They feed information to GOL intelligence agencies, which are effective. Anything shared with the GOL is leaked immediately to Hizballah, however.

¶17. (C) Ja'ja's second proposed solution was to solve the Sheba'a Farms issue expeditiously. If the issue is solved in a month or two, he assessed, Hizballah will be disarmed politically. Berri would be free to oppose the "resistance." The internal cohesion of Hizballah, and the unity between Hizballah and Amal, would be gone. Do whatever it takes to obtain Israeli withdrawal from the Sheba'a Farms, he appealed.

¶18. (C) DAS Danin suggested that Lebanese may be backing themselves into a corner with the Sheba'a Farms issue, and doubted that the Israelis would see such withdrawal as worthwhile. Handing the land over to Lebanon would also require UN support and Syrian agreement; how can Lebanon get around Damascus' veto?

¶19. (C) By unilateral drawing the border, Ja'ja' responded.

There is a precedent, he noted, in the drawing of the Iraq/Kuwait border following the first Gulf War. The UN has ample documentation of Lebanon's claim to unilaterally determine the border. Danin pointed out that the UN certified complete Israeli withdrawal from Lebanon in 2000, but Ja'ja' replied that the UN certified the "withdrawal line" but did not assert that that line was an international border.

¶20. (C) Ja'ja' allowed that the Sheba'a Farms is "not such a big deal -- 48 or 55 square kilometers. But this is how to disarm Hizballah." Even the Shia won't fight if Sheba'a is returned. Sheba'a has assumed mythical dimensions, he said. Handing over the Sheba'a -- to Lebanon or to the UN -- in the right way could give a boost to the GOL.

¶21. (C) Asked what would happen if Hassan Nasrallah imposed additional conditionalities on disarming, such as the creation of a "strong state" as mentioned in his September 22 address, Ja'ja' responded that Hizballah, in such a case, would be creating an internal problem and "we will deal with them."

ELECTIONS

¶22. (C) Ja'ja' was confident that President Lahoud could be removed without extraordinary effort. The March 14 coalition enjoys a parliamentary majority with 71 deputies, and will elect a new president on time before the expiration of Lahoud's term, he said. March 8 figures may insist that electing a president requires a two-thirds majority of Parliament, but that is only for the first round, he asserted. On the second round, March 14 will elect a president with a simple majority.

¶23. (C) On parliamentary elections and the "flawed" electoral law, Ja'ja' allowed that the issue is a "bone of contention" between the Lebanese Forces and the rest of its March 14 partners. While the LF supports reforming the law, it believes that "now is not the time" due to the risk of creating tension within the coalition. The priority now, he said, should be on strengthening the government and establishing the international tribunal.

¶24. (U) This message has been cleared by DAS Danin.
MURRAY